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ABSTRACT

Available literature does not provide systematic data concerning the problems mothers face when leaving their children in the care of others as they pursue career or education. This study is designed to provide such data. A questionnaire including standard demographic questions and two general questions (Why did you decide to place your children in day care? Did the decision cause you any problems?) was administered to two sample groups. Two two samples consisted of 32 University student parents and working class families from the San Diego area. Analysis of the data indicated that: (1) the campus population had younger children in care, had more mothers continuing in careers, expressed more concern about the child's placement, and had less difficulty with fees; (2) mothers forced to work because of economic necessity tended to attribute the need for day care placement to the need for the child to learn "to get along with others"; (3) parents who had some options about child care and who left their children in child care were more apt to say that they needed care for the child so the mother could "take a break" or "pursue her own goals" and were more likely to question and worry about having others care for their children. (MP)

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Other Than Mother Care and Its Effect on the Mother

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Abstract

There are subtle stresses on family life today which serve to interfere with the relationships of even the most self-actualizing couples. As more and more women return to work or commence a career, the inarticulate process of early socialization becomes apparent and couples may find themselves at odds within themselves and with each other over "the Woman's place."

In this pilot study we began with two small samples (N 33). One sample consisted of student parents and the second of working class families. Our preliminary findings suggest that mothers who were forced to work from economic necessity reduced their cognitive dissonance by attributing the need for day care placement to the need for the child to learn "to get along with others." Those parents who had some options about child care and who left their children in child care for shorter periods of time, were freer to say that they needed care for the children so the mother could "take a break" or pursue her own goals. These data tend to support the findings of Hoffman in Hoffman, I. & Nye, I., The Employed Mother in America, as well as information supplied by a questionnaire used in Callahan's book, The Working Mother. A comparison between these groups is made.

Other Than Mother Care and Its Effect on the Mother[1]

Other than mother care is defined as any provision made by a mother for care of her child, by a person or persons other than herself, for more than half the day over an extended period of time. This can, of course, include arrangements made when the mother has an extended illness or if the mother simply desires not to have the total responsibility for child care. However, for purposes of this paper we have chosen to exclude the latter situations. For purposes of this paper, foster placement and adoption are also not discussed.

A student of mine,[2] and I became involved with this question as a result of our own personal experiences. I found that as she raised questions in class, I was answering them more from my own experience than from "professional expertise." I also wondered why a young woman, twenty years my junior, was coping with the same personal struggles in terms of mothering that I had. The basic issue is that for a woman to mother, study and work is an arduous task. I commenced graduate school in 1954 and completed my Ph.D. in 1974. Judy has taken more than the usual four years to complete a college degree. I had honestly thought that there had been a sufficient change in attitude toward the "out of home" mother so that a young woman of today would not have to deal with the conflicts of women my age. Slightly older women may have had an advantage—the men were off to war and someone was expected to take their place.

Our culture in myth as well as dicta maintains a mother must remain with her own children. In simple nursery rhyme we are admonished . . .

Lady bug, lady bug, fly away home,

Your house is on fire, your children will burn[3]

Implicit in this verse is that a mother must not leave her children or they will suffer dire consequences. Not only had I chanted this verse as a child, but my attitude toward mothering was also determined in large part by male authors on the subject. Smuts, in his book on Women and Work in America, 1959, quotes Grant Allen who in 1889 had the following to say about women, work, and mothering:

> All that is distinctly human is man: the field, the ship, the mine, the workshop: all that is truly woman is merely reproductive--the nursery, the school-room. There are women to be sure who inherit much of male faculty; and some of these prefer to follow male vocations; but in so doing they for the most part unsex themselves; they fail to perform satisfactorily their maternal duties (p. 116).

How many men have been asked "Are you going to be a father or have a career?" We are, of course, familiar with Freud's dictum, "Anatomy is destiny." Freudian folk wisdom was perpetuated in both the middle class who went to college and in the lower class whose case workers were by and large trained in the psychoanalytic tradition. The post-war world was filled with shibboleths concerning the harm done to the child should the mother leave. Goldfarb's (1947) retrospective studies on foster children and children raised in orphanages reported a significantly higher rate of pathology than children reared at home. Bowlby made a pronouncement to

the World Health Organization that children must not be separated from their mothers or severe character disorders would result (WHO, 1952). Spitz' (1951) classic study of Anaclytic Depression and Separation Anxiety further buttressed the proponents of only mother care for the young. I do not intend to undermine the significance of these studies. They have helped us to understand that even the young baby does not survive if he is shifted from pillar to post but their samples were children in extreme conditions. Goldfarb addresses the problems of institutional rearing and constant change of care givers for an entire day over long periods of time. Bowlby (1952) and A. Freud (1944) were concerned with youngsters separated from parents during war time, many of whom had lost their natural parent. Finally, Spitz' sample was women prisoners and there is no indication that the depression or anxiety suffered was not as much a function of the environment as it was from separation. Here, too, the separation was permanent, not just eight hours a day, five days a week.

The post war dictum that the woman was to return home and rear her children was not the province of the psychoanalytically oriented social worker, psychologist, or psychiatrist but Talcott Parsons (1951), a well known sociologist, also implied that, we as a nation needed mothers at home, to rear them. Needless to say, any woman who dared pursue a career and have children did so with fear and trembling.

Since my student made this decision some 20 years later than I, I had thought with some naivete that the attitude toward a mother's place had changed, it seemed reasonable to see what modern pundits were proclaiming vis-a-vis the mother's place. No less an authority than Berry Brazelton is quoted as saying:

> An understanding of the importance of their role as mothers, as well as the realization of its potential in their families, may help them see it as a goal that transcends anything they can achieve in their professional life. This is a goal for the education of women. (Evans, B., and Saia, G., 1972).

In 1975, Blumenfeld, in his book The Retreat from Motherhood, devoted his last three chapters to the following:

Chapter 10. Mother Love and Modern Obstetrics

In this chapter he quotes the work of Klaus and Tennell and suggests that a mother must be given the opportunity to form an attachment with her child from the moment of birth or she may suffer from an inability to mother appropriately.

Chapter 11. Love, Loyalty, Attachment, and Separation

Here he quotes the well known studies of Bowlby, Harlow, and Ainsworth. The obvious conclusion is that if the mother does not remain at home and mother her children, they will be unable to form adequate loyalties, loves, and attachments later on in life.

Chapter 12. What do You Tell Your Daughter?

Finally he terminates his treatise by stating we must tell our daughters "all that you can" (p. 195), and in his terms this means cultivate the maternal virtues.

> Not only are you to cultivate maternal virtues but you teach that our real enemy is scientific conceit which asserts "that the human race needs nothing but a good social engineer right out of Harvard or MIT." (p. 208).

Robert White (1959), a well known researcher and authority in the field of child development, some years ago took issue with the then popular Freudian drive reduction theory of motivation. He then developed a theory of "effectence" motivation which means simply that persons have a natural inclination to be competent and effective. He was also sure that this was learned drive and that it was learned at a very early age. Burton White, at the Boston Preschool project, has been involved in research for several years which has been studying the development of competence. In a summary statement of the results of this research he states:

> It becomes increasingly apparent that the development of competency in the child rests squarely on the mother's shoulders. (Nixon, 1971).

With all this awesome responsibility foisted upon the mother, how can a woman in her right mind leave the children at home and return to work? However awesome this responsibility may be, I suggest that Lopata (1971), in her book Occupation Housewife, articulates many of the concerns of the modern mother whether she has assistance from another or not. As the result of an extensive study of 571 housewives from all socio-economic levels she concludes:

> The social role of mother does not produce many women who express full confidence in their ability to perform it at desired levels. In fact, the more educated the American metropolitan woman, the more conscious she is of the complexity of this role and of the difficulties involved in competent childbearing. The relational emphasis of this type of mother, combined with a societal focusing of responsibility on

> her awareness of the importance of the home for child development, make for worry over actions designed to best meet the goals of the relation . . . Physical care is no longer the primary concern of the mother but she is responsible for the child's emotional well being as well. (Lopata, p. 375.)

With this as background we set out to see if we could discover whether mothers other than ourselves had problems when leaving their children in the care of other persons as they pursued career or education. Maternal employment has been studied ad nauseum. Researchers have explored the relationship between maternal employment and the terms of the child's emotional, social, and cognitive development as well as his achievement in school. Other researchers have studied the effects of maternal employment on husband and wife relations. Furthermore, they have sought to find out what the preferred modes of other than mother care are, or what mode of other than mother care was most frequently used. No one has asked directly how the mother felt about leaving her child in the care of another. The classic in the field of maternal employment is a book edited by Ivan Nye and Lois Hoffman in 1963. This collection of studies includes three chapters which may be considered within our purview. Joseph Perry (in Hoffman and Nye, pp. 182-189) addresses the topic of mother substitutes. He found that mothers select substitutes who reflect their own values. The substitutes were untrained and the majority chose this line of work in order that they might not leave their own children in the care of another and still be able to earn extra money. The most often expressed concern of mothers about mother substitutes was either that the mother substitute was too strict or too lenient with their child.

Mothers were asked "What worries, if any, do you have about how your child is getting along with the person who is caring for him?" Eighty-five percent of the respondents said, "None." The 15 percent who mentioned worries listed the following:

1. The possibility that the child might want to be home with his mother;
2. The possibility of illness and accidents;
3. The child's behavior with the mother substitute; and
4. In two cases a fear that the youth of the mother substitute might lead to difficulties.

Chapters which dealt with the mental health of the employed mother did not include any questions which related to how she felt about having her child cared for by another (Hoffman and Nye, 1963).

The study by Ginsberg and his associates (Ginsberg, et al., 1966), Life Styles of Educated Women in America, shed more heat than light on our question. His sample was such that one would expect a high percentage of his respondents to have delegated child care to another. His population was selected from women who had entered a graduate program at Columbia University in the immediate postwar years. His questionnaire included an item which asked if the woman had children but the specific question was,

> 9. When you made your decision regarding graduate education, were you aware of any problems involved in combining marriage and a career (italics mine)?
>
> Yes____ No____ Please explain_____" (p. 200).

The fallout from this question was spontaneous. Mothers mention that either:

1. They should remain at home and rear their children because they had received an excellent education and therefore would make better caregivers, or
2. They have spent many years preparing for a career and do not mean to waste it rearing children.[4]

Ruderman (1968) undertook a comprehensive study which included seven metropolitan areas and all socioeconomic levels. Her technique was to interview the mothers who had children cared for by another either in home or out of home, and her questionnaire would seem to be most sensitive to a mother's feeling about other than her own care. Unfortunately her primary concern was different from ours and her analysis of the data was concerned with "Does a mother who works outside of the home have adequate care for the child and what are the needs for care of the women who work." In her conclusions she makes an important point which may relate to our question. Traditionally, day care has involved a "case work" approach. Day care was originally established for families who could not cope with city life or for immigrant families whose children needed to be "socialized in the American tradition." Currently, federal support of day care programs implies that the staff provides a better environment than the home. There is no doubt that day care implies some stigma for the participants. What Ruderman is trying to say is that many intact, healthy families could use the service of a day care center--they do not need the caseworker nor the implication that their home is inadequate. Yudkin and Holmes (1969) in their work, Working Mothers and Their Children, mention in passing that working women apparently have missed a crucial bonding experience and seem

to be less involved with their children than those mothers who do not go out to work. These mothers are described as more "detached than their non-working peers." This is not an uncommon assumption in the literature; however, one is hard put to find any empirical data to support this position.

Callahan (1971) has collected a series of expository essays which were based on a standard questionnaire. (See Table 1.) This material was organized and analyzed in a similar fashion to the analysis of the small San Diego sample. The material in Callahan's book provides answers to our basic question: "How does leaving a child in another's care affect the mother--how does she feel about it." Admittedly this questionnaire was provided all respondents, most answered in an individualistic style which meant culling much information from the text. Her questions were closer to the ones we were asking. She specifically asked: "What aspects of your child rearing have given you the greatest concern in pursuing your work? Have you felt conflict between mothering and working? What experience have you had with mother-substitutes, have you worried about the kind of influence these people would have on your children? Have you been especially influenced in your child rearing decisions by any of the literature on women, work, and child rearing?" (Not one respondent addressed this question.) "What conflicts, if any, have you had with your husband concerning your effort to combine mothering and work, or general family life and work? (Callahan, 1971, 251-253.)

INSERT TABLE 1.

Since we had searched the literature in vain to find any systematic data on the effects of other than mother care on the mother, we devised a short questionnaire and interviewed 36 parents who had placed their children in day care. We include only 32 in the sample since four of our respondents were fathers. Our questionnaire was deliberately simplistic, since we did not wish to suggest answers and we hoped that the mother would spontaneously give us the information we sought. The questionnaire included standard demographic data and two general questions:

1. Why did you decide to place your child in day care?
2. Did this decision cause you any problems?

Our population was selected from an on-campus (San Diego State University) program which provides care for the children of students, faculty, and staff, and a community-based program, as well, which was supported in part by the YMCA. (See Table 2.)

INSERT TABLE 2.

Our population differed in several respects. The campus population (N 20) had younger children in care, had more mothers continuing in a career, and had less difficulty with fees. The campus population also expressed more concern about the child's placement. Both groups concurred that simply getting children to the center was a "hassle."

All responses were read and divided into response categories. Two persons then read the responses and placed them into categories. The agreement between readers was 98 percent. (See Table 3.) The responses to the first question waere divided further into responses, i.e., "Mother centered,"

or "child centered." A mother centered response was considered to be one in which the respondent said "I needed a break" or "I wish to continue my career"; a child centered response was one such as "he needs to learn to get along with others," or "it provides additional stimulation." The first question was again analyzed in terms of positive and negative reasons for care. A negative reason might be, "I couldn't find a baby sitter," and a

career"; a child centered response was one such as "he needs to learn to get along with others," or "it provides additional stimulation." The first question was again analyzed in terms of positive and negative reasons for care. A negative reason might be, "I couldn't find a baby sitter," and a

positive reason might be "I wanted to pursue a career."

INSERT TABLE 3.

We attempted to see if we might find some relationships between demographic variables and categories of responses as well as between responses themselves. However, none were significant but four items were sufficiently close to give us leads for further research. Our working mothers had had mothers who worked. Therefore, many had had a model.

The material from Callahan (1971) was analyzed to compare with our findings. The descriptive information of these fifteen working women is found in Table 3. Many of the categories overlap and the women were categorized by how they spent the majority of their time. With several respondents it was difficult to ascertain as they did freelance writing, teaching, and were students concomitantly. The socio-economic status was determined by the women's professions. The category, Provisions made for Care, does

not reflect the true nature of "care." Of the four families with "live in" help, three had a person who served as a "nanny" or mother surrogate plus a daily person to clean and cook. The provisions made for mother surrogates or "nannies" were most innovative. One family employed a foreign male student while another had a retired university professor.

These essays were scanned for general themes which were considered to be tangential to our original questions. At least six of these employed mothers mentioned that our national priorities interfered with a meaningful family life and job. Such comments made were, e.g., that work is set up at the expense of children and family life, competition is unfair and hours of employment are rigidly enforced. In fact, all women whose jobs required that they maintain regular schedules mentioned this factor, while those women who had flexible hours did not. One mother specifically stated her ambivalence about joining the work force. At the time she wrote the essay she was a freelance writer and completing a Ph.D. She has since completed a very fine book, Who's Minding the Children (Sleinfels, 1976). An interpretation of this response, as well as another mother, was simply that her life is her work and her family and neither fit neatly into the regular patterns of the American way of life.

Eight mothers in the Callahan sample said that constant fatigue or a feeling that they did not have sufficient energy was a major difficulty. The constant pressure to be a perfect worker, wife, and mother was explicitly stated by one, while two women mentioned that they felt it very necessary that career aspirations must not infringe on family life in any way. These women felt duty-bound to make sure the laundry was done, the

house was kept, and that they entertain their husband's friends in a manner that did not infringe on their husband's life style. However, the majority of these working mothers stated that the decision was a joint decision and that they could not have managed without the complete support of their spouse.

Callahan asked also if the respondent's mother had worked when she was young. It was not clear in all cases whether no mention of a working mother was to be interpreted as a negative answer. Seven members responded that their mothers had worked (three black and four white).

These mothers articulated several specific effects of having another care for their children. Guilty was a term used in one form or another by eight of the 15, e.g., memories drift back of my youngest son, then about two, sobbing at the door, begging me not to leave, of disturbing fantasies of possible injuries, physical and psychological, which could occur that filled my mind traveling to and from work . . . in all this slush of feelings, separation, guilt, and anxiety there emerged a clear intellectual evaluation . . ." (Callahan, p. 180.) "I have seen develop a 'please forgive me' syndrome . . . There is always the impulse to return from work laden with gifts . . . Rules are relaxed . . . Apologies are made . . ." (Callahan, p. 136). All but two mothers expressed concern over the child's health. Many felt that when the child was ill that she must be with him and one went so far as to say "an absolute requirement for a working mother is healthy children" (Callahan, p. 72). Four women suffered from "role conflict" and felt social pressure from the community, i.e., "good mothers stay at home." A very major obstacle for all these mothers was obtaining adequate substitute care and all had paid their pound of flesh. At the

time the essays were written, four mothers had found an adequate solution to "other care" but they had a history of horror tales to include. One of these mothers was satisfied with her care. She had had the same caregiver for 14 years. She felt the solution was perfect, the caregiver was there only while she worked and she hired someone to live-in to clean and cook. This way she could spend all her free time with her children. She describes herself as a "jealous mother who would not be able to share easily the care of her children with another." Two mothers maintained that the help must meet their standards and these mothers expressed a specific concern that they, the mothers, must control the socialization of the children. This concern was expressed in terms of subtle threats to the family's values system. Both of these mothers were opposed to outside of the home day care, either in a nursery school situation or all day care because they felt their children would be socialized to conform or follow the group. Adequate help is expensive and those who have felt comfortable with the care of their child were those whose combined salaries afford more than one person to replace the mother when she left the home.[5] One mother said that adequate help was an insoluble problem and the constant strain involved in employing a person to care for her children led her to work out a solution so that her children were in school when she was away at work--for her no one would be adequate! The mother who freelanced as a T.V. producer figured out that after she had bought clothes, paid her help, and her taxes she cleared all of $100.00 in seven months!

When we compare our data with Callahan's study we came to some very tentative conclusions. Our questionnaire was evidently not sensitive to the specific information which shed sufficient light on our specific questions.

There was an interesting distribution in our sample and in the Callahan data as well. It becomes obvious that those mothers who state that they had to work and this was why they placed their child in care outside the home were also the mothers who did not spontaneously discuss any problems that this arrangement might have caused them. Callahan's mothers, too, were reticent to discuss how they "felt" if they were mothers who had to work because they had no other support of the family. This fits into Festinger's model of "cognitive dissonance," i.e., if your behavior is dissonant with your beliefs you will change your beliefs in order to make the behavior less dissonant. No one can deny that a mother who must work cannot afford the psychological luxury of contemplating her navel and asking "am I doing the 'right' thing for my child" simply because she has no choice. We find the mothers with options are those who are more apt to question and worry about other care for their children. As we continue to explore this question our hypothesis will be framed in this theoretical model.

The fact is that more and more women are returning to work and they are returning to work earlier, i.e., when they still have young children at home. When a woman with children returns to work, someone must care for these children, other than mother care is more expensive for the mother, emotionally and financially than for any other member of the family.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Paper based on a talk presented to the American Association of Marriage and Family Counselors, San Francisco, October 7, 1976.
2. I wish to thank Judy Duncan who assisted with the collection and analysis of data.
3. Another working mother reports that she too remembered this same nursery rhyme (Callahan, p. 187).
4. I would suspect that the spontaneous remark would correlate highly with the field in which the woman took her graduate work. I have not attempted to sort this information since it would be nigh onto impossible to do from the presentation of results.
5. Callahan's questionnaire included the area which Ruderman addressed. "What do you see as preferred options for other than mother care?" These mothers either said there was no possible solution, four actively opposed day care as an alternative, four actively supported day care. They felt their children would have had better supervision in a center based program than provisions made for a baby sitter in the home. It is not surprising to find that the four who opposed day care as an alternative to mother care were in a financial position to hire expensive help.

TABLE 1

from Callahan, The Working Mother

N = 15

Occupation	
Professional	
Theologian	1
Lawyer	1
Physician	2
Psychologist	1
TV Producer	1
Professor	1
Community Organizer	1
Researcher	1
Student	3
Secretary	3
Full-time Work	6
Part-time Work	9
Socioeconomic Ethnic Distribution	
White Upper Middle Class	6
White Middle Class	5
Black Upper Middle Class	1
Black Middle Class	1
Black Lower Middle Class	2
Provisions made for Child Care	
Baby-sitter	9
Live-in Help	4
Children in School	2

TABLE 2
STUDENTS AND WORKING MOTHERS
WITH CHILDREN IN DAY CARE

Sample Size = 32
Age of Mother: X = 27; Range = 22-39

	SDSU Faculty/Staff Day Care	Full-time YMCA Day Care
Mother's Education	15.3	14.4
Father's Education	16.6	16.3
Age of Child in Care	2 yrs. 3 mos	4 yrs. 3 mos.
Hours in Day Care/Week	15.8	33
	DID THIS DECISION TO PLACE YOUR CHILD IN OTHERS' CARE CAUSE DIFFICULTY? IF SO, WHAT?	
Separation problems	Mother = 3% Both = 6%	0%
Facility uncomfortable	0%	17%
No problems	12%	36%
Fees	3%*	24%
Logistics	18%	17%
Pressure from others	6%	6%
Value conflict	6%	0%
Health hazards	12%	0%
Vague apprehension	3%	0%
Institutional care	3%	0%
Roles and priorities	3%	0%
Guilt, re, time w/child	9%	0%

*subsidized

most often response = #5

TABLE 3
CATEGORIES OF RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRE
Why did you decide to place your child in Day Care?

Response	SDSU	Full time day care
To learn to live with others	28%	38%
Stimulation	10%	15%
Career continuation	30%	15%
Bad babysitter	8%	11%
Economic	6%	23%
Give mom a break	8%	4%
Convenience	10%	0%
Mother-centered	54%	28%
Child-centered	46%	72%
Positive	54%	28%
Negative	40%	10%
Response cited most often	#1	#5
MODELS: MOTHERS OF RESPONDEES HAD WORKED OUTSIDE OF HOME		
Females	66%	66%
Males	41%	60%